Moving your career forward

“Make moves now to get you closer to your goal...”

Welcome to the Spring edition of the PDA Newsletter! Greetings from your fellow postdoc PDA co-chairs. Hopefully you have stayed very productive this winter inside the lab (unless you are a skiing/snowboard/ice skating type of person!). Luckily Spring is near, and with that, great opportunities to get out of the lab and literally and figuratively take steps to continue to grow your career.

Here at the PDA, we are continuously striving to provide opportunities to get you closer to your career goals. Our most recent and future events intend to answer questions related to the transitioning process into your career choice, and to help you network to get guidance by professionals more advanced in their career journey.

Last February we hosted a Panel on Transitioning into Academia, where we had 6 young investigators that had successfully received faculty positions and had your questions answered during the session. We are planning to have a similar event later this semester with professionals working in research careers in Industry and careers in policy and regulatory fields.

Don’t underestimate the power of networking.

We have offered and will continue to plan Online Brazen Events, where you can chat with professionals in diverse careers from the comfort of your computer. This is a great opportunity to network in a stress-free environment, get specific contacts and learn insights into the job market that otherwise will be very difficult to learn. Currently, only 15% of PhDs get tenure track faculty positions within 6 years of postgrad (Cyranoski, D. et. al., Nature, 2011); it is a great idea to be open minded, network with professionals outside of your field and even if you are planning to stay in Academia, it may open doors for future collaborations. In the same way, we encourage you to take advantage of network opportunities within our PDA events. You will greatly benefit from getting to know your fellow postdocs. Learning what other postdocs do might allow you to start collaborations, make you aware of new technologies in development and may help you develop new friends.

Last October, 2014, there was a clarification released Defining the Dual Role of Graduate Students and Postdocs Supported by Research Grants ** that stated: "For non-Federal entities that educate and engage students in research, the dual role of students as both trainees and employees contributing to the completion of Federal awards for research must be recognized in the application of these principles." Staff in postdoctoral positions engaged in research, while not generally pursuing an additional degree, are expected to be actively engaged in their training and career development under their research appointments as Post-Docs. This dual role is critical in order to provide Post-Docs with sufficient experience and mentoring for them to successfully pursue independent careers in research and related fields." In other words, it clarifies that in addition to get data, publish and be great at asking smart questions for future investigations, our training also involves other career development components essential for a successful career in the sciences. That is part of the PDA’s mission to provide some additional tools for you career development; take advantage of these!

You are in charge of your career, and we encourage you to actively take steps to propel your career forward. Make moves now to get you closer to your goal, and don’t wait until your postdoc appointment is close to its end.

Much success!
Sheila Bello-Irizarry and Alex Thomé
PDA Co-Chairs

Please visit our online version of this newsletter @ www.postdocs.urmc.edu
Postdoctoral Association Activities in Pictures
Anton W. Yun, PhD


18th August 2014. NPAW: Best Posters Award Presentation and Free dinner

22th October 2014. Career Planning Workshop by Dr. Philip S. Clifford.

Get to know PDA Committee

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Join PDA?
Would you like to be part of the PDA committee? Please come participate with us every 2nd Tuesday of the month at 12:30. Please email wanaruk_chaimayo@urmc.rochester.edu to ask for location which alternates between River Campus and the Medical Center.

Please visit the online versions of our newsletters @
www.rochester.edu/gradstudies/pda/newsletter.html

Join our Facebook group
By searching "University of Rochester - Postdoc Association" (or click this link)

Or use your smartphone to scan this QR code

Why join a UR PDA Committee?
Be involved at U of R beyond conducting scientific research.
Improve your networking by interacting with peers, top-level scientists, and university administrators.
Build your management, leadership, and communications skills—a selling point for your next job search.
Learn about planning and organizing meetings, seminars and other events of your interests while educating other postdocs.
We realize as a postdoc your time is valuable. The executive committee meets only once a month for an hour. Otherwise, any additional time commitment is completely your decision.
Career Development for Postdoc
Patrice Tankam, PhD

When I moved in the US two years ago as a postdoc, my goal was to strengthen the skills that will allow me a secure an academic position in the US. Coming from France where I did my PhD and prior two-year postdoc, the US system and culture were completely new to me. To fill this very important gap in my career development, I literally took all the opportunities outside of my research activities to time to time go out of the lab and learn from people’s experience and get involved in the UR community. I then joined the postdoctoral association to meet with other postdocs in the campus. I would say this was the starting point of my professional and social development. I met with talented people of the PDA board, who devote their time and energy to give to postdocs a memorable experience at the UR. I joined this synergy few months later by leading the communication/Networking position.

Why transitioning from communication/networking to career development position this year?

As a board member, I had the opportunity to represent our PDA at two major events, the first being the 2014 National Postdoctoral Association annual meeting. I also received the travel award to participate to the 2014 Postdoctoral Preparation Institute meeting on career transition. These meetings provided me with insights into the challenges of career development for postdocs and graduate students. I thought

Challenge facing the postdoctoral training

Career paths for doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers have historically focused on securing tenure track faculty positions. With 40,000 to almost 90,000 postdocs in the workforce, these coveted positions are becoming increasingly scarce. The imbalance between the number of postdocs and the number of tenure track position is frightening. According to the AAAS (Science Careers), 10 to 15% of postdocs will end up with tenure. As a result, we progressively are encouraged to expand our career planning beyond traditional research and academic positions.

Diversifying Your Career Path

Advice for Transferring Your Skills Outside of Academia

In addition to the economic realities of academic science, there is a growing trend towards raising awareness of opportunities for PhD-level professionals in such areas as communications, policy, entrepreneurship, consulting and program management. As a result, we progressively are encouraged to expand the scope of our career planning beyond traditional research and academic positions.

There is a critical need to be aware of the different career paths outside the Academia. Examples of different career paths for postdocs include: Management consulting, Technology Transfer Agent, Patent Agent, Grant facilitator, Technical support, Medical Science Agent/ Medical Affairs, Government, Writers, etc.

Recommended Resources

NPA Core Competencies: As the research landscape continues to evolve, new opportunities and career paths for postdoctoral scholars to apply their knowledge and skills outside of academia arise. The NPA Core Competencies captures 6 major needs for postdocs to segue into professional careers. The document provides ideas and resources on how you can help your postdocs master these skills: http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/

Literature:

Gibbs, Jr., Kenneth D. and Griffin, Kimberly A. What do I Want to be with my PhD? The Roles of Personal Values and Structural Dynamics in Shaping the Career Interests of Recent Biomedical Sience PhD Graduates. CBE LifeSci Educ


Websites and LinkedIn Groups:

Versatile PhD: http://versatilephd.com/ provides resources and an overview of diverse career foe PhDs in STEM, the Humanities and Social Sciences. Also provides opportunities for networking with individuals in your local community.

SciPhD: www.sciphd.com Resources, consulting service, webinars, online assessment tolls and guidance professional career preparation for PhDs.

Vitae: www.vitae.ac.uk Tailored for researchers, this site offers a professional development framework and support tolls for career skills development.

PhD Careers Outside of Academia: LinkedIn group for PhDs considering non-academic careers. Allows for networking, discussion and job seeking to members.

(Continued on the next page..)
Since 1982, almost 800,000 PhDs were awarded in science and engineering (S&E) fields, whereas only about 100,000 academic faculty positions were created in those fields within the same time frame. The number of S&E PhDs awarded annually has also increased over this time frame, from ~19,000 in 1982 to ~36,000 in 2011. The number of faculty positions created each year, however, has not changed, with roughly 3,000 new positions created annually.1, 10

Transitioning into Academia
Jay Garaycochea, PhD, Aslihan Ambeskovic, PhD and Anton W. Yun, PhD

During your PhD research, you become an expert on the topic that you study. It is a good idea to become an expert in a different topic that would synergize with your previous expertise during your post-doctoral research. This way, you can distinguish yourself from other researchers.

One of the key elements that signify that you are ready to apply for a faculty position is having a research narrative describing the direction that your research is headed based on your published papers. It is also equally important to show that your research diverges significantly from your advisor’s research. The most notable event is when your advisor says you are ready to begin applying.

While departments are looking for a well-rounded researcher, it is the number of papers published and who you worked for that will get your application to the top of the pile. The research proposal will be the 90% of the reason for a job offer. This is different at a teaching university, as a large portion of the application will focus on your teaching plan.

Besides being productive in your research area, you also need experience in training undergraduates, management, grant writing, and teaching. You need to show that you have all the checkboxes that would be expected from faculty.

Apply to as many universities as you can. Check for openings that are aligned with your research. Keep in mind that you can still apply to positions that are not a perfect match. However, do not apply just for the sake of applying. You don’t want to waste your and other people’s time.

Sometimes the universities that you are applying to might not get back to you. Resilience is very important in finding a job in academia. Follow application seasons and keep your eyes open for opportunities.

Be interactive at every stage of your career. Develop relationships with your peers. Conferences are a great place to keep your connections that you’ve made and to keep your visibility in the field.

Recently, University of Rochester Postdoctoral Association invited six young professors to share their experiences and provide advice for current postdocs and graduate students who are planning a career in academia. In this event, topics ranging from the interview process to networking were covered. Here are some highlights from the panel.

A sign of a good postdoctoral mentor is the track record of mentor’s former trainees. A good postdoctoral mentor should allow you to progress throughout the author list of publications where you are the first author, then the second last and finally the last author. If you joined a junior faculty member’s lab as a postdoc, you can gain some experience in setting up a lab and this, you can put on your resume. However, junior faculty may not have a project for you to take when you leave.

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As a postdoc you might be familiar with a working day that looks like this. In the morning you arrive to work, check e-mail, reply to the urgent once, check your most visited internet cites, google few things. You collect & open your post, create a to-do list, then it’s coffee break time. You check e-mails again, then it’s telecon, lunch, group meeting, lab work, catch up with colleagues, phone calls, check e-mails & facebook. You fill in expenses claim, submit an order form, and check e-mails & facebook again. End of the day.

And although you did a lot in your day and kept yourself busy, you have this little nagging feeling at the back of your mind that you were not exactly very productive. Projects seem to be moving slowly, there is not as much progress as you would like to see, you feel quite overwhelmed at times, and motivation is slipping away. The worst of all is the feeling that it’s never enough no matter how much you do.

It bothers you that you can’t find the time to sit down and write that one paper you wanted to write for months now. Ideally, you should be writing three of them. Five would be even better (if counting those from your previous employment). You are not sure where to start and anxious it’s going to take too long. You worry about discussing it with your co-authors and fear the criticism of the referees.

You are not alone. Many scientists struggle with it daily. It is a universal predicament. It is not that you are not good enough. And the good news is that it is absolutely possible to turn it around, make a start and stay on track with your paper and other things that will make 2015 your most productive year yet. Here are five doable steps that you can take today and instantly uplevel your productivity.

1) Decide which paper to write

If you are running several research projects in parallel then you are probably caught up in thoughts like this: “I need to write more papers, I need to publish more.” But when asked “Which paper you are going to write next?” you don’t actually know which one to choose. And if you cannot choose, you won’t ever start writing, right?

Although you can be working on several papers in parallel, you need to choose one to make a start. And if you are having several papers in mind, it is time to choose ONE now. This could be the one that will have the most impact on your career in the next 6 months, the one that is the easiest to write up, or the one that you have most control over.

2) Set a deadline

The thing about papers is... that they don’t usually have a deadline. And if there is no deadline, there is no work. On the other hand, when you have a close deadline you become super productive during the last couple of days before the deadline, don’t you? Take advantage of this phenomenon and set a deadline by when you want to have a draft of your paper ready.

Look in your calendar right now to see if there is anything big coming up in the next 3-6 months? If you are attending a conference, a new experiment or a friend’s wedding you might want to choose to have a draft of your paper ready by then! Now you can create intermediate deadlines for various stages of your paper.

3) Start with the end in mind

Choosing a particular journal for which to write this paper proves to add more focus and make writing easier. When you decide which journal you are going to write for, you can go to that journal’s website and check for the available guidelines for various types of articles and even download the format file. Having an outline of the paper in front of you as well as knowing the style and other requirements for the journal helps you to shift from procrastination into action. This is simply because you are no longer sitting in front of a blank page but filling in certain section following a defined format.

Make a list of possible journals you can submit your paper to. Brainstorm the list with your supervisor or your colleagues and make an imperfect choice. It will be easier to re-write this paper for another journal than to start from scratch!

4) Take imperfect action

Our striving for perfection unfortunately gets in the way of writing papers. We procrastinate with starting writing delaying until we feel ready to start. We wait until we know enough, have read enough and understand enough. We wait until all thoughts have crystallized in our head before we put them down on paper. This can last forever! The secret to being a productive postdoc lies in ability to take an imperfect action. Start writing that paper before you feel ready. Start writing even before you are finished with data collection.

A lot of scientists feel so uncomfortable with writing imperfectly that they never start or delay for months or even years. Be willing to produce a bad draft first. Walk away from it, come back and make an improvement (which by the way feels really good!) Then improve it again. And soon enough you will have a version of the paper that is ok to show to your colleagues.

5) Keep coming back to it

Congratulations on making a start and taking an imperfect action with writing your paper! Now the trick is to keep coming back to it. As Steven Pressfield says in his book “The war of art”: “There’s a secret that real writers know... it’s not the writing part that’s hard. What’s hard is sitting down to write.” And you have probably noticed that every time you plan to sit down to work on your paper there is either a group meeting that is scheduled in this time slot, or a colleague comes with an urgent request or there is a lab emergency. Sitting down to write despite of all the distractions and interruption is an unmistakable skill of a productive postdoc. You need to become an expert at hiding from everyday busy-ness to write for as little as 30 min a day. You would want to have “writing time” in your schedule as well as have reminders around you about which paper you are working on and why it’s important for you to complete it.

Olga Degtyareva, PhD, has had a successful 15-years research career in Physics, and now is a productivity mentor for scientists and researchers. She helps them to overcome overwhelm, become more productive, get in charge of their day while feeling happier in their life. Visit Olga’s blog for more advice on how to start writing and get your paper done, how to balance your work and life and how to uplevel your research career: http://olgadegtyareva.com
Edward G. Miner Library now offers the Bioinformatics Consulting and Education Service (BCES) to support members of the URMC community through one-on-one consulting and a variety of workshops on bioinformatics topics, including experimental design, data analysis and interpretation, and training in the use of a variety of tools for high-throughput biological studies. Moreover, the BCES is part of a collaborative network of information and bioinformatics services at the University of Rochester, allowing us to refer patrons to other resources to meet their needs.

If you are just getting started with genomics and bioinformatics or are an experienced user looking for a new perspective, sign up for a class, browse through our web-based resources on Bioinformatics and Molecular Biology or Biostatistics and Computational Biology or contact:

Helene McMurray, PhD at Helene_McMurray@urmc.rochester.edu or 275-6940 for one-on-one help.
Today, I would like to introduce you to Dr. Bass and BEST program. BEST program is the newly funded program from NIH aiming to broaden experiences for graduate students and postdocs.

1. Please introduce yourself, current position and brief academic background (Undergrad, Graduate school, postdoctoral training, etc.)

I’m the executive director for the BEST (Broadening Experiences in Scientific Training) program at the University of Rochester. My academic background was pretty traditional with an undergraduate degree in Chemistry at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, graduate degree in Organic Chemistry at the University of Washington-Seattle, and then postdoctoral work that spanned both chemistry and laboratory medicine at the University of Minnesota-Minneapolis. The slight twist came when I joined the Department of Microbiology at the University of Washington-Seattle as a research scientist/engineer IV to work on host-virus interactions using systems biology, starting with microarrays. You could think of the position as a group leader for specific virus projects. I worked on influenza virus, herpes simplex virus and SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) coronavirus.

At that point I had never taken a virology class in my life, but my work with biomolecule synthesis and surface chemistry, including that of microarrays, was the thread of continuity in my trajectory. My research scientist job required much more data analysis and writing from me than bench work. In fact, I was assigned laboratory technicians to do the experiments necessary for my projects, and I was expected to organize the projects, interact with collaborators, analyze data and write manuscripts and grants. If my PI saw me at the bench, he jokingly yelled at me to get back to my computer; he wasn’t paying me to pipette. So at that stage in my career, I had already moved away from the bench.

2. You then moved out of academia. How did you decide and was it difficult to make that transition?

It wasn’t a very difficult decision for me. At each stage of my academic career, I was enjoying learning new science and writing more and more. At night, I copy edited for scientists with English as a second language and the journal Review of Modern Physics. I even took a course in science writing at the University of Washington to fine tune my writing skills. All these experiences were good for my academic work, but in reality, the main reason I did these activities was because I really enjoyed reading and writing about science. I finally decided to make the jump when I wanted to move to New York City, a city filled with publishing houses, and I found an editorial position on a job board at Nature Publishing Group. I worked on the new NPG publication Science-Business Exchange (SciBX) for two years as an associate editor while in New York City and for six years as a senior editor while working remotely in Rochester. At the same time, I freelanced at the University of Rochester, helping graduate students with manuscripts and qualifying exams.

3. When did you think that you were ready for changing to the new direction of career? (if this is applicable)

Coming back to academics, as research-related administrator, wasn’t very difficult because I had dabbled with helping graduate students while working at NPG. If you’re looking for patterns, I guess it’s obvious to see that the activities I dabbled with, outside of my “day job,” became my next career choice. In a sense, I got my toes wet before diving in. Helping to develop the URBEST program is different yet somewhat similar to developing a new publication.

Did I think I was ready? I’ve never been completely sure in any move that I’ve made in my career if I’m adequately prepared. I didn’t know if I had enough knowledge or skills to guide trainees with their career development, but I did know that when I previously worked with graduate students, I really enjoyed the work and the conversations. I briefly discussed my plans and hopes with Dr. Steve Dewhurst, and he pointed me to a University of Rochester job advertisement. So with people you trust, always take the opportunity to talk about your next steps and hopes about what you want to do or where you want to go. Sometimes people can offer you guidance right away. Other times, they store this information away, but will recognize opportunities for you later on.

4. What should graduate students/postdocs do when they don’t know (or have not decided) about their future career paths?

Graduate students/postdocs should realize it’s OK to not know exactly what you want as a future career path, but you should also organize your time to do a variety of research- or science-related things, outside of your “day job” in order to find out what you really like to do. Talk to PhDs that have non-academic jobs that seem interesting; many people are very open to sharing their stories. For some graduate students/postdocs, these suggestions might not seem useful because they know that research in academics is what they really like and want to do. For those individuals, you need to start developing skills required for young investigators that will lead future laboratories. Many of these skills you will not learn by doing the day-to-day activities of a graduate student or postdoc. Get your PI to help you and attend activities designed to support and guide future investigators. Start thinking about how your science niche will be distinct from your PI’s, initiating or managing collaborative projects, and helping with grant writing or writing your own grant. Figure out how to interact with IRBs, IBCs and IACUC. If you don’t know what these acronyms are, it’s time to find out. All graduate students and postdocs are researchers. As a trainee, you need to take some of that “research mind” and investigate your interests and your future career.

(Continued on the next page..)
5. How to keep concentration or focus on what you are doing, when you might doubt yourself and be unsure about your career future.

Take it step by step. You can gain some confidence by focusing on your primary goals of getting your PhD and/or manuscripts published and moving toward those goals little by little. You need to realize you have a little bit of “wiggle room” at the University. Take a look around and explore things that are interesting to you. For people I meet that are going through a phase of doubt (and we all do), I tell them to create a folder on their computer where they can store all of the successes they accomplish, such as experiments that work well, complimentary or thankful emails, a great question they asked at seminar, etc. For those days of doubt, it’s a comfort and a reminder that better days are ahead somewhere. If this is too “touchy feely”, you can also use these items to fill in accomplishments on your Individual Development Plans or yearly evaluations. It’s a win-win situation.

Questions for URBEST

1. As you are now working as a program director/coordinator for URBEST, could you please tell us briefly what URBEST is and how it helps prepare graduate students/postdocs for their future careers?

URBEST is an NIH-funded program to help health science and biomedical PhD graduate students and postdoctoral appointees to explore and better prepare themselves for diverse career paths. The program combines educational activities to highlight research-related careers and to instruct in leadership and professionalism. We have open enrollment twice a year and trainees enter into the URBEST program as a “cohort.” At this time, we have two cohorts.

In addition, URBEST provides opportunities to a subgroup of trainees for short-term (hours per week) or long-term (full time for up to three month) internships as a capstone experience. This process is more selective, and we look to see that the trainee is productive with their research, is engaged in URBEST activities, and that their PI approves internship participation.

2. How can graduate students/postdocs make use the URBEST effectively?

Each individual will have their own way of using URBEST effectively. Our URBEST program stands apart from other BEST programs in that we incorporate self-determination theory. The premise is that if the psychological needs of the trainee are met—through competence, relatedness and autonomy—motivation and engagement will be fostered, leading to enhanced performance, persistence and creativity. What each trainee needs to fulfill those psychological needs will be unique and that’s why we selected to use a flexible, autonomy-supportive learning program. Graduate students/postdocs select the activities that are of interest to them, every URBEST activity is assigned points, and we track how many points each trainee accumulates. This process helps us evaluate engagement in the program and to select individuals for internship opportunities. URBEST also allows trainees to gain points through activities that are outside the program but are URBEST-like.

As a first step, I would suggest doing the required reading for the Career Story Q&A seminars and attending the seminars that sound interesting with to you. Each speaker holds a PhD and works in an area outside the traditional academic realm. Don’t be afraid to ask questions of the speaker and if really interested, follow up with the speaker on your own time to learn what you can do to build skills that are needed for a similar job. Also, start looking at job boards and titles of PhD graduates that work in research-related careers. How do you know what type of job you want, if you are only aware of a few different job titles? My favorite title of a University of Rochester alum is Chief Innovation Evangelist; it’s printed on her business card!

3. The Point of contact website that graduate students/postdocs will know about URBEST activity.

You can learn more about URBEST at urbest.urmc.rochester.edu and feel free to contact me at tracey.baas@urmc.rochester.edu I’m always happy to set up a ~20 minute chat to discuss or brainstorm any career or academic topic. You can also check in with URBEST Pathways Leaders Paul Dunman (Industry and Entrepreneurship), Joan Adamo (Regulatory Affairs) or Katrina Korfmacher and Scott Steel (Science and Technology Policy) to learn more about what you can do to explore individual pathways.
Postdoc Accomplishments 2014-2015
Anton W. Yun, PhD

MRINALINI
Department of Biology
Award: Fellowship Award from National University of Singapore (NUS)

CHAD A. LERNER
URMC Environmental Medicine


JENNA PUCCINI
Center for Neural Development and Disease
Award: Poster Award. 6th Annual HIV/AIDS Symposium, University of Rochester. 2nd place, 5th Annual National Postdoc Appreciation Week. University of Rochester.

Postdoctoral Mentoring Award, School of Medicine and Dentistry Convocation Ceremony, University of Rochester Medical Center.

CAMILLE R. QUINN
Department of Psychiatry


Grant
University of Rochester, Center for Community Health, Community Health Mini—Grant, Title, Training Community Service Providers in Narrative Exposure Therapy: Extending Power—NET to Address the Needs of Pregnant and Parenting Youth Exposed to Interpersonal Violence.

WANARUK CHAIMAYO
Dermatology
Publication

Award

PATTRICE TANKAM
The Institute of Optics
Center for Visual Science

Call for Entries!
Share your experience, international column, recipes, jokes, accomplishments . and other informative resources with your fellow postdocs.
Submit entries to:
Wanaruk_Chaimayo@urmc.rochester.edu

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THE WORLD IS WAITING
VOLUNTEER for an HIV vaccine study.

You may qualify if you are 18-50 years old, healthy, and HIV-negative. Participants are paid an average of $750.

Study vaccines are synthetic (man-made). It is impossible to get HIV infection from the vaccine.

CONTACT US TO LEARN MORE:
www.rochestervictoryalliance.org
585.756.2DAY

Rochester Victory Alliance

Gwen M. Greene
Career & Internship Center
University of Rochester, River Campus

Center for Professional Development
University of Rochester Medical Center

Graduate Education and Postdoctoral Affairs (GEPA) provides you guidance and information, for PDF version, please click –>